

BUILDING A STRONG CHURCH TOGETHER



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WHY WE NEED AND LOVE THE CHURCH

Old school saint Cyprian once said the following:

“You cannot have God as your Father
if you do not have the church as your mother.”

A slightly-edited John Calvin said something similar:

“By faith in the gospel, Christ becomes ours, and we are made partakers of salvation and eternal blessedness. But as our ignorance, sloth, and vanity stand in need of external helps, by which faith may be begotten in us, and may increase and make progress until its consummation, God, in accommodation to our infirmity, has added such helps, and secured the effectual preaching of the gospel, by depositing this treasure with the Church. He has appointed pastors and teachers, by whose lips he might edify his people; he has invested them with authority, and, in short, omitted nothing that might conduce to holy consent in the faith, and to right order. In particular, he has instituted sacraments, which we feel by experience to be most useful helps in fostering and confirming our faith. These are housed in the Church, into whose bosom God is pleased to collect his children. To those whom he is a Father, the Church must also be a mother.”

In other words, the church – her doctrine, mission, authority, relationships, sacraments and all - is a gracious and loving gift from our Father to us. And joining ourselves to a particular local church family is our way of receiving this gift.

Remember, when Jesus saves us, He doesn't save us by ourselves for ourselves. He saves us into the historical and global community of saints who have been justified by faith in His person and work. This means that the Christian life is a “we” endeavor, lived out in real-life, flesh-and-blood, face-to-face community for the glory of God, the good of one another, and the good of those who we have been sent to. By God's grace, we are now members of Christ's body, dependent upon Him as our head, intimately and necessarily connected to one another.

One of the many implications of these truths is that we love the local church and want to be an integral part of her life and mission. Nothing could hold us back from loving her people, submitting to her pastors, benefiting from her means of grace, funding her work, and advancing her mission.

EVERY BOSTONIAN JESUS GIVES US, LOVED AND GOSPELED REALLY WELL

Here is what we are most excited about at Seven Mile Road: becoming a church that loves and leads all-set, ungospeled Bostonians to Jesus.

- By “all-set” we mean decidedly secular, crazy busy, change-averse folks who are not following Jesus or actively seeking to be part of a church community.
- By "ungospeled" we mean folks who are living their day-to-day lives outside of any meaningful gospel influence. They don't watch Christian television, read Christian books, or have any Christian friends or family. And whatever gospel they have been exposed to is likely a fabrication or caricature.
- By “Bostonians” we mean anyone living near our Melrose space, whether they are born-and-raised, here-to-stay, or just-passing-through.

Our mission is to build a church that meets, loves, and gospels these specific people well together. We are not doing church for the sake of doing church, or for our own private benefit or comfort, or as retreat from the godless commonwealth that is Massachusetts. We want Seven Mile Road to be a force for gospel advance in our time and place.

This means that church membership here is about more than just being good church members. Yes, we need folks who are devoted to attending, giving, growing, serving, submitting, uniting, etc. But church membership here is also about learning to be good missionaries. This will look differently for each one of us of course, but we all need to be excited about every facet of our church life being informed by the mission Jesus has us on.

The good news is that we are eminently qualified for this work!

We are all just a bunch of recovering all-set Bostonians ourselves - ones who have been floored by the grace of the gospel and want to see its goodness, beauty, and truth known in our souls and our cities.

OUR 5 ESSENTIALS

There are five core values that drive everything about who we are and what we do together. It is crucial that you are both clear on and committed to these essentials if being a member of Seven Mile Road is going to make sense for you.

1: GOSPEL CENTRALITY

All that God is for us in Christ animating everything we are and do.

2: HOLINESS AND HUMILITY

Unwavering commitment to holy living without legalism or pretense.

3: ORTHODOX THEOLOGY

Scripture as the first and final authority for all our faith and practice.

4: SUPERTIGHT COMMUNITY

Life shared long-term in tight-knit and transparent community.

5: MISSIONAL LIVING

Lots of meeting, loving and engaging friends and neighbors.

COVENANTING TOGETHER

The word “covenant” is not one that modern Americans are very familiar with, but God’s people have always lived together as a covenanted people. At its core, this means that we happily bind ourselves to each other around certain commitments that define our life together and enable our mission to thrive.

COMMITMENTS THE CHURCH MAKES TO HER MEMBERS

1: THE WORD

Seven Mile Road, through the work of called, gifted, and qualified leaders, will fearlessly preach the gospel and all its implications and faithfully guard the doctrinal gate.

2: THE SACRAMENTS

Seven Mile Road, as a local church under the authority of Christ, will affirm the member’s gospel profession through the right administration of the sacraments.

3: SPIRITUAL OVERSIGHT

Seven Mile Road will give spiritual oversight to her members, including: pastoral care and counsel as appropriate; discipleship of members through multiple avenues over time; discipline of members for habitual, unrepentant sin.

4: MINISTRY INTEGRITY

Seven Mile Road, through her officers and staff, will execute all work related of the life and mission of the church with wisdom, diligence, and integrity.

COMMITMENTS THE MEMBERS MAKE TO THE CHURCH

1: PRESENCE

I will gather regularly on Jesus' Day with Jesus' people, and I will make a consistent, good faith effort to engage in our other key rhythms of church life as season allows.

2: SUBMISSION

I recognize that certain called, gifted and qualified men will serve the body as pastors/elders/overseers, and I will gladly submit myself to their leadership and to their loving discipline should I embrace habitual, unrepentant sin.

3: GENEROSITY

I will give generously to the gospel work that is happening in and through our local church. I understand that my pastors will be aware of my giving patterns as a means of encouraging my discipleship.

4: SERVICE

I will humbly and happily serve as needs or gospel opportunities arise and season allows.

QUALIFICATIONS FOR MEMBERSHIP

Before becoming a member of Seven Mile Road, please confirm that each of these are true:

1: I am a professing Christian. I've believed the gospel and I'm committed to pursuing glad obedience to Jesus in every area of my life.

2: I have been baptized.

3: I am clear on and committed to Seven Mile Road's Vision, Values, Polity, Statement of Faith, and Bylaws.

4: I live in close enough proximity to be fully invested in the church's life/mission.

5: I have met with a pastor regarding membership at Seven Mile Road.

ON GIVING TO THE CHURCH

Seven Mile Road works because our members give generously. We are a young church with no endowment, no rental income, and no sugar daddy in the background - and that's ok. What we do have is a community of people who love the gospel, value the mission of their local church, and trust God with their money.

As a general rule, Seven Milers are committed to living on 90% or less of what the Lord enables us to earn so that we can give 10% or more to the work of the church and the advance of the gospel.

Here are some basic principles to consider as you begin to give:

IT'S NOT YOUR MONEY

It's God's, and it's given to you so that you can show off the surpassing worth of Jesus and His gospel. What an invitation!

ALL OUR GIVING SHOULD BE GOSPEL-DRIVEN

Over and over again in Scripture, the motivation given for Christian generosity is NOT legalism or guilt but rather freedom and joy. We give our money away for others because gave Himself for us.

YOU CAN LIVE ON 90% OR LESS THAN WHAT YOU MAKE

We encourage everyone at Seven Mile Road to "tithe or more," which means giving away the 10% or more of what Jesus lets you make in a given year. Doing so would require you to live on 90% or less of your annual income. You can do it.

GIVE FIRST AND MOST TO YOUR LOCAL CHURCH

First be sure that your local church - which is the epicenter for fully-formed discipleship happening in your own life - is amply funded for her work and that you are doing your part to get her there; then give to other worthy gospel works, of which there are many!

THERE ARE ALWAYS EXCEPTIONS TO THE RULE

Scenarios sometimes arise where someone ends up in very difficult financial straits that effect their capacity to give well. We need gospel wisdom and the Spirit's counsel in assessing particular, exceptional situations as they arise. This is where community, accountability, and talking-things-through with the pastors and the saints come in, and where humility and love and patience and faith can emerge. We never want to be the church that fights, condemns, or attacks about money, but rather encourages one another in the good work of giving.

ON LEAVING A CHURCH

While church membership is not a life-long covenant like marriage, it is serious nonetheless. When we become members of a local church, that church is publicly – before God and man - affirming our profession of faith. By accepting us into membership, the church is saying, “You are now in the family of and under the authority of God – Father, Son, and Spirit.” Because of this, a member cannot unilaterally terminate his or her membership in a church. Transitioning out of membership is always to be done in conversation with and submission to the authority of the church and her elders.

Biblically-speaking, there are three ways in which one’s membership in a local church can end:

1: THE CHURCH DISQUALIFIES HERSELF

If heresy is introduced and embraced in the church, or if Christ-dishonoring and people-harming sin is tolerated in leadership or membership, the right thing to do is to humbly but clearly call attention to these things. If the church refuses to repent and reform her ways, we are given no choice but to remove ourselves and find a faithful church. May these things never happen here!

2: THE MEMBER IS GRANTED RELEASE

Release should be the norm for anyone who ever leaves a local church, with the member being released into the care of another true church. Ordinary reasons for release are many, including things like geography changes, marriage or other new family situation, church planting opportunities, another church becomes a more appropriate fit for you and your family, etc.

That said, it is important to note that church-membership-for-the-long-haul is not easy and there will be seasons where we are tempted to seek a release from membership because of the difficulties inherent with church life. Any collection of sinners brought together in close proximity for an extended period of time will run into relational conflict. In addition, things change over time in any institution, and sometimes we feel like we are on the outside looking in at those changes. In these cases of conflict or change, leaving the church should be seen as a last resort.

Church-hopping is an awful American invention that short-circuits opportunities for the Spirit to work lasting change in us for God’s glory.

If a member does begin considering seeking release from the church, it is expected that he or she will not isolate themselves from pastoral authority or Christian community in the process. The worst thing ever for a pastor, church, or gospel community is to get notice from someone that they have been “thinking and praying for a while” about leaving the church and are now doing so, all without ever having

communicated their concerns to anyone. A high view of the church compels us to lean into prayer and honest conversation in these cases.

3: THE MEMBER IS REMOVED

A third and final means of terminating covenant membership is for the member to come under church discipline for serious and unrepentant sin.

Church discipline, when practiced biblically, is a loving implication of the gospel that promotes health throughout the church and insures that our witness to the world is clear and the reputation of Jesus Christ is protected.

When it is apparent that a member has become hardened and unwilling to repent of sin, or that sin rather than obedience to Christ is characteristic of their life, then, in love, the church may ask them to abstain from taking the elements of the Lord's Table or, as a last resort, remove their membership.

THE SEVEN MILE ROAD FAMILY OF CHURCHES

Seven Mile Road Melrose is a part of a family of churches that exist to make Jesus known by planting gospel-centered churches among distinct people groups in the greater Boston area because we believe that we can do more and healthier gospel work together than apart.

In addition to providing obvious economies of time, expertise and scale, this family model allows local churches to concentrate on the essentials of their local, missional ministry while benefiting from the hard work and collective wisdom of an Executive Board/Unified Team.

THE NAME “SEVEN MILE ROAD”

Nope, you wouldn’t be the first person who needed a helpful explanation about our name.

Seven Mile Road emerges from the text of Luke 24 and the story of the Emmaus Road. This road – where Jesus came alongside two disciples in their quest to know the truth, where the huge realities of Jesus and His Gospel were heralded, where the Scriptures were illuminated, where grace was extended, where their hearts burned and their eyes were opened, where they sprinted back down on a mission to tell others this amazing gospel – ran “seven miles from Jerusalem” to Emmaus.

Get it now?

Our hope is that the story of this road is the story of our churches. We long to be about coming alongside New Englanders, extending grace, living and declaring the wonderful and surprising truth about Jesus and His gospel that has come to us in the Scriptures, seeing souls redeemed for His glory and their joy, and watching those whom God has graced being sent on mission back to the places they are from and beginning the redemptive cycle all over again.

STATEMENT OF FAITH

Seven Mile Road receives Scripture as the inspired Word of God which alone stands as the final authority for our faith and our practice. Working from there, our hope is that our theology would always reflect a humble orthodoxy as we pursue God's truth together. In solidarity with the saints that have gone before us, we happily confess with the universal Church the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds. For a detailed Statement of Faith, visit:

<http://sevenmileroad.org/about-us/statement-of-faith/>

BYLAWS

To read the entirety of Seven Mile Road's by-laws, contact Pastor Justin Gottlieb at justin@sevenmileroad.org.

POLITY

Jesus loves His church. He died for her, and He is preparing a new, perfected, sinless, infinitely happy heaven and earth for her. In the meantime, He has gifted her with leaders and sacraments to build her up toward maturity in Him in a Spirit-driven and orderly fashion.

“Polity” is just the fancy word for how a church is led and governed. We describe our polity at Seven Mile Road as being elder-governed with high congregational involvement.

JESUS

Jesus is the Chief Shepherd and Senior Pastor of Seven Mile Road. By His Spirit and through His Word, He lovingly cares for and commands us. He is our greatest treasure, highest authority, and deepest joy.

PASTORAL TEAM

In love, Jesus has given His church elders/overseers/shepherds to love and lead His people. Elders/overseers/shepherds are graced and godly men, called by Jesus to serve the church by praying and preaching the Word, administering the sacraments, exercising church discipline, and governing the church. Since the members of Jesus’ body represent Jesus to the world, elders are responsible to see that the individual saints under their care are pursuing holiness and unity in accord with the clear commands of Scripture and the covenantal commitments they have made as members of the local church.

DIACONAL TEAMS

In love, Jesus has also given His church deacons to come alongside elders in handling a variety of practical ministries for the good of the church and the advance of her mission.

CONGREGATION

All of us function as members of the body of Christ gathered at Seven Mile Road. The church is its members. As our elders/overseers/shepherds lead carefully, prayerfully, and transparently, they do so in constant communication with the membership, particularly around decisions of great magnitude for our life together, such as affirming officers, excommunicating unrepentant members, stepping into large financial commitments, etc.

QUALIFICATIONS FOR PASTORAL AUTHORITY

It is important for members to know how officers are appointed at Seven Mile Road.

Potential elders/overseers/shepherds must meet the following qualifications:

- Member in good standing of Seven Mile Road
- Called, gifted, and qualified by Jesus
- Completed Ox Track
- Recommended by Local and Executive Pastoral teams
- Affirmed by congregation
- Open ended call/commitment, subject to evaluation regularly

THE SACRAMENTS

Jesus has given the church two sacraments, or means of grace, that serve to publicly affirm and spiritually strengthen Jesus' people in their confession of faith and believing of the gospel. The sacraments are to be administered by and under the authority of the officers of the church.

BAPTISM

WHAT IS BAPTISM?

Baptism is a means of grace, given to us by Christ, by which we are welcomed into the family of God and the fellowship of the church.

WHAT DOES BAPTISM DO?

1. Baptism signs and seals us as belonging to Christ.
2. Baptism affirms and strengthens our faith.
3. Baptism declares our faith to the world

WHAT DOES BAPTISM NOT DO?

1. Baptism does not save.
2. Baptism is not “necessary” for salvation.

WHAT IS THE PROPER CONTEXT FOR BAPTISM?

The sacraments belong to the church, so baptism is meant to be administered under the authority of qualified officers of the church.

WHAT IS THE PROPER TIMING OF BAPTISM?

When baptism should be administered has been debated for a long time by Jesus-loving saints.

Here at Seven Mile Road, we practice “credo-baptism.” This means that we believe that baptism is best administered when someone has professed faith in Christ and when solid evidences of that faith (understanding of the gospel, sorrow for and repentance of sin, affections for Christ, hunger for truth, counting of the cost, love for the church, etc.) are present in their life. In other words, we baptize someone when they make a credible profession of faith.

WHAT IS THE PROPER MODE OF BAPTISM?

How baptism should be administered has also been debated for a long time by Jesus-loving saints.

Here at Seven Mile Road, we opt for immersion. For us, this mode best communicates some of the most crucial realities of baptism, like our union with Christ in His death and resurrection.

WHAT ABOUT OUR CHILDREN?

At what age to baptize sons and daughters who have been raised in the life of the church has also been debated for a long time by Jesus-loving saints.

We believe that one of the ways that God works is through households, intending for his gospel grace to run downstream for generations to those who love and fear Him. We raise our children in hope that His grace will take root in their souls as we prayerfully surround them with love, instruction, and discipline at home and in church.

While everyone's gospel story is unique, many of our children will come to love and trust Christ while still under our care. Although we have no specific minimum age requirement for baptism, we do wait until our children are of a certain maturity before welcoming them into the waters of baptism. Ordinarily, this wouldn't be until after their completion of our three-year gospel formation (catechism) class that begins in 4th grade. This is not meant to confuse or discourage our littlest ones from loving and obeying Jesus with us at a very young age! Rather, it is meant to love them by ensuring that their baptism is anchored in a faith that is understood and owned by them and evidenced in their lives.

THE LORD'S TABLE

WHAT IS THE LORD'S SUPPER/COMMUNION?

The Lord's Supper is the perpetual ordinance/sacrament that continually marks us as belonging to Christ. What a magnificent grace Jesus has given to us in inviting us to eat at His table! This meal is the ongoing sign and seal of our faith.

WHAT DOES EATING AT JESUS' TABLE DO?

When we share this meal together, we are:

- renewing covenant with Christ
- proclaiming His death until He comes
- remembering the sacrifice that He made for us
- identifying ourselves as belonging to Him
- displaying our oneness as His humble, blood-bought people
- getting a taste of the feast that awaits us in His kingdom

WHO IS THIS MEAL FOR?

This meal is not for everyone, but only for those who have responded to the gospel with repentance from sin and faith in Jesus and are baptized members of His church, living in glad submission to the pastoral authority that God has given them.

WAS “CHURCH MEMBERSHIP” PRACTICED IN THE EARLY CHURCH?

Even a casual reading of the New Testament shows that Jesus’ Church was marked by a beautiful, messy, holy intimacy. These saints knew each other’s names, stories, sins, strengths, weaknesses, issues, dreams, fears, all of it. They shared life together, and they had identified leaders leading them in that life.

Was all of this possible with only a loose, informal association, or was there a more formal awareness of who was and wasn’t a part of a given church community?

In the early church, coming to Christ was coming to the church. The idea of experiencing salvation without belonging to a local church is foreign to the New Testament. When individuals repented and believed in Christ, they were baptized and added to the church (Acts 2:41, 47; 5:14; 16:5). More than simply living out a private commitment to Christ, this meant joining together formally with other believers in a local assembly and devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread, and prayer (Acts 2:42).

The epistles of the New Testament were written to churches. In the case of the few written to individuals—such as Philemon, Timothy and Titus—these individuals were leaders in churches. The New Testament epistles themselves demonstrate that the Lord assumed that believers would be committed to a local assembly. There is also evidence in the New Testament that just as there was a list of widows eligible for financial support (1 Tim. 5:9), there may also have been a list of members that grew as people were saved (cf. Acts 2:41, 47; 5:14; 16:5). In fact, when a believer moved to another city, his church often wrote a letter of commendation to his new church (Acts 18:27; Rom. 16:1; Col. 4:10; cf. 2 Cor. 3:1-2).

In the book of Acts, much of the terminology fits only with the concept of formal church membership. Phrases such as “the whole congregation” (6:5), “the church in Jerusalem” (8:1), “the disciples” in Jerusalem (9:26), “in every church” (14:23), “the whole church” (15:17), and “the elders of the church” in Ephesus (20:17), all suggest recognizable church membership with well-defined boundaries (also see 1 Cor. 5:4; 14:23; and Heb. 10:25). 17